



THE INDEPENDENT

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Urban smog kills 24,000 Britons every year

Pollution caused mainly by traffic fumes kills up to 24,000 people prematurely each year. **Jeremy Laurence, Health Editor, examines the findings of an official report which will increase the pressure on the Government to cut car use.**

When the smog hangs heavy in the city it is poisoning the population that breathes it. The first report to measure the effects of air pollution in Britain concludes that its immediate effect is to hasten the deaths of between 12,000 and 24,000 vulnerable people and to trigger up to 24,000 hospital admissions each year.

This is certain to be an underestimate, because the report does not take account of the long-term effects of living in polluted cities. That is to be the subject of a further study.

The findings, by the Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, a government advisory body, indicate a more serious problem than expected. Launching the document yesterday, Frank Dobson, the Secretary of State for Health, flanked by Michael Meacher, the Environment Minister, and Sir Kenneth Calman, the Chief Medical Officer, said: "This report clearly confirms that air pollution damages health."

The findings triggered immediate demands for a cut in road traffic. The British Medical Association warned: "The grim reaper comes early on days of heavy air pollution." Friends of the Earth said the deaths figure was "extremely alarming" and the British Lung Foundation described it as "very serious."

Professor Stephen Holgate, chairman of the committee, said he had been surprised by the size of the effect. Speaking after the launch, he said that although the worst effects of pollution were on those who were frail, elderly or sick, there was growing evidence that healthy individuals were affected, too.

"Respiratory infections are getting worse. Air pollution reduces the capacity

of the lung to combat viruses and possibly bacteria. Whether this is because of air pollution outside or inside the home needs to be sorted out," he said.

Sir Kenneth Calman sought to reduce alarm by emphasising that it was people who were already seriously ill with chronic respiratory disease who were most at risk. "They are not dying because of air pollution, they are dying because the contribution of air pollution to their ill health tips the balance."

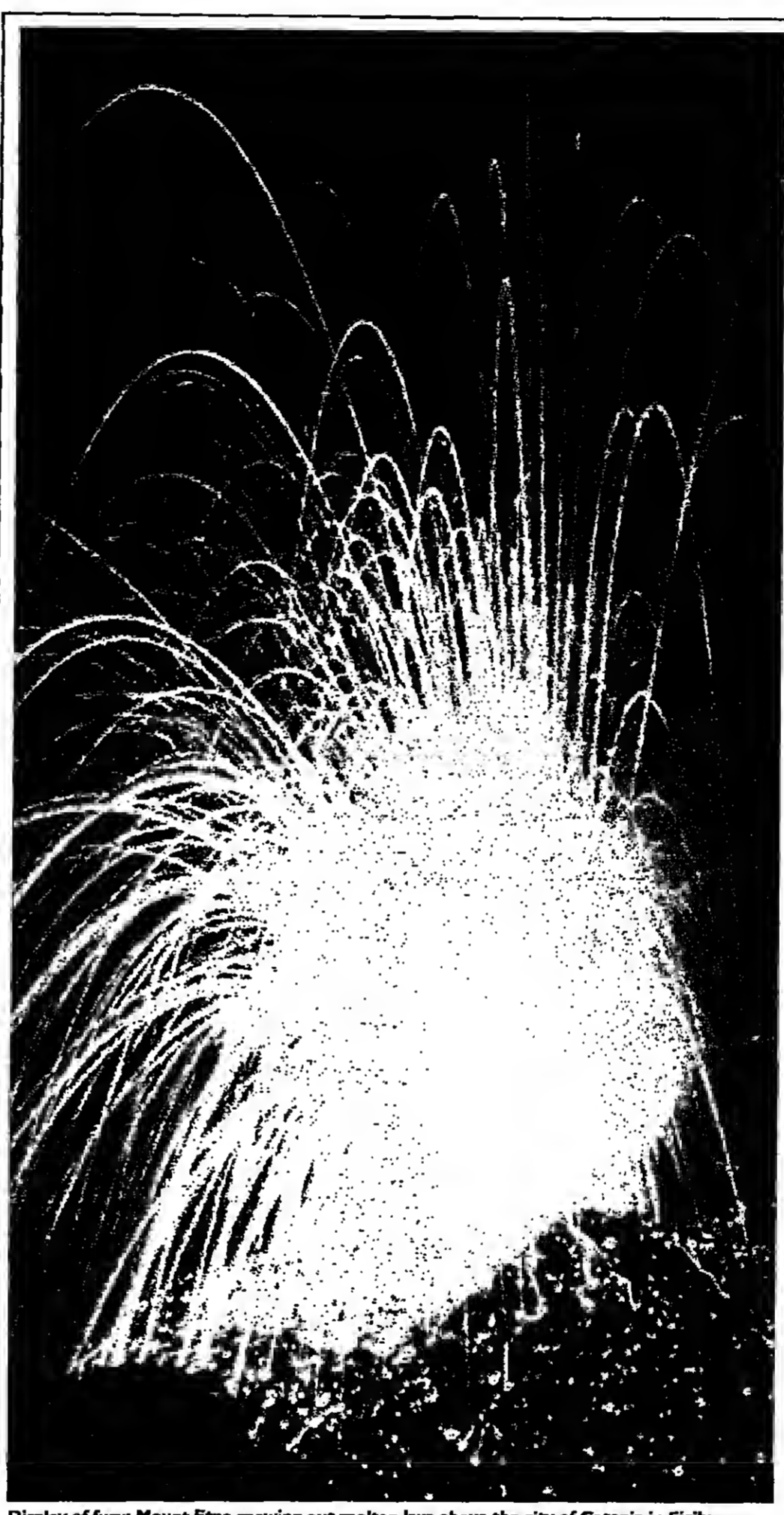
He said they were not necessarily extra deaths or hospital admissions but ones that had been "brought forward", in some cases by a few days, but in other cases by a "somewhat longer period." He compared the effect with that of the cold in winter, which is linked with 30,000 extra deaths between October and March.

Mr Meacher said the findings contained a "major lesson" for transport. A white paper will set out proposals to reduce car use and technical measures to cut pollution. The AA, the motoring organisation, said drivers should not be made scapegoats for poor air quality and claimed that toxic exhaust gases were down 22 per cent compared with 1992.

The report, *Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the UK*, says pollution has three effects: many chemicals, such as sulphur dioxide and ozone, act as irritants to the bronchial tubes of the lung. Some, such as nitrogen dioxide and ozone, release substances that damage the lung lining. Together these cause inflammation, irritation and make the lung less efficient at fighting infection.

Particulates, the tiny particles produced mainly by the burning of diesel fuel, are the most dangerous. The smallest, known as PM10s, are drawn deep into the lungs where they are absorbed, causing damage to tissue as they are processed. They can trigger blood clots.

Professor Jon Ayres, a member of the committee, said it was likely that pollution had long-term effects on health but these remained to be proved. "What we would like to know is if you live in a town like London all your life, is it significantly shortened compared with living in a rural area. That is the big question."



Display of fury: Mount Etna spewing out molten lava above the city of Catania in Sicily yesterday. Earthquakes rattling the volcano have raised fears that a true eruption is imminent - the last major one was six years ago. Photograph: Fabrizio Villa/AP

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INDEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT
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TODAY'S NEWS

Ulster talks backed
The Northern Ireland political talks surmounted another significant hurdle when all parties agreed to use Monday's London-Dublin document as a basis for negotiation. But Sinn Féin made it clear that this did not imply approval of its contents. Page 4

More time for three Rs
The Government pressed ahead with its campaign to boost the basics in education by making more room in the primary school day for the three Rs. Schools are to be permitted to spend less time on some compulsory subjects - like history, geography and design and technology. Page 5

Docklands bomb trial
It was "little short of a miracle" that an enormous lorry bomb claimed only two lives when it exploded at Canary Wharf in London Docklands, an Old Bailey jury was told. Two men from Northern Ireland men deny conspiring to cause the explosion. Page 9

High cost of Tony's VIPs
Tony Blair's government makes more use of Heathrow Airport's VIP facilities than its Tory predecessor did, it emerged last night. The cost of suites mounted to £1.6m in the seven months from May. Page 6

President Blair trumps Brown on welfare

Ministers expressed astonishment yesterday at allegations that Gordon Brown wants to curb child benefit for the better-off - in defiance of a Labour manifesto pledge. **Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, reports that it will fuel No 10 suspicion about the Chancellor's ambitions, and analyses the edgy relationship between the Downing Street neighbours.**



Head on: The Prime Minister (left) and his Chancellor may not see eye to eye on welfare

Tony Blair is expected by Cabinet colleagues to use his new Cabinet committee on welfare reform to assert his authority over the Chancellor of the Exchequer - who has told friends that he is "Prime Minister" to the Blair "presidency".

The real Prime Minister, who returned to Britain from Tokyo last night, is to open a national campaign for welfare reform in the West Midlands tomorrow night.

In a rare in-depth Cabinet discussion of a single issue before Christmas - a reaction to the shock Commons revolt over the cut in lone parents' benefits - it was decided that Mr Blair should chair a new

committee on welfare reform, to give coherence to a policy that was in danger of developing piecemeal.

Some Cabinet colleagues saw that as a direct slap-down for Mr Brown, who was the motive force behind the curbs on lone parent benefit, introduced by Harriet Harman, Secretary of State for Social Security.

But there was dismay yesterday that, for the second time in a month, well-informed

"Treasury sources" had floated suggestions that Mr Brown was planning to tax child benefit, along with a revival of controversial plans to remove the benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time schooling.

One report said the taxation of child benefit, "a move that could be announced as early as the March Budget", could mean better-off mothers losing more than £1,000 a year.

The manifesto says: "We

are committed to retain universal child benefit where it is universal today - from birth to age 16 - and to uprate it at least in line with prices." Taxation, even for the better-off, would be a clear breach of that pledge.

The Treasury-inspired reports, described by one minister as unhelpful mischief-making, come on top of last week's disclosures that Mr Brown believed Mr Blair had betrayed a personal pact to stand

aside in any leadership contest.

Mr Blair told BBC television's *Breakfast with Frost* on Sunday that there was no secret pact, and sources close to the Prime Minister said it was nonsense to suggest that he could have beaten Mr Blair in the 1994 contest to succeed John Smith.

A source close to the Chancellor yesterday protested that Mr Brown's alleged campaign to increase his party power-base that complaints had been made about the number of meetings he was holding with MPs.

However, *The Independent* has been told that after one No 11 party for MPs, a dissident backbencher had thanked Mr Brown for a wonderful party, to which the Chancellor had replied: "The Labour Party? Yes, it was a wonderful party, wasn't it?"

Mr Blair said on Sunday that Mr Brown was one of his "closest, closest friends", and if people were hoping that the Tory history of prime ministers falling out with their chancellors was going to be repeated, they were in for a disappointment.

Nevertheless, it is known that Mr Blair has on a number of occasions imposed his will upon the Chancellor.

He vetoed Mr Brown's pre-election demand for a new higher top rate of income tax; he blocked a manifesto commitment to abolish child benefit for the over-16 school children and he insisted that Mr Brown should make a Commons statement ruling out membership of the European single currency before the next election.

One of the Cabinet-level complaints made about Mr Brown is that he runs economic policy far too close to his chest. There were real fears that he was exerting the same close control over welfare reform.

Now that Mr Blair has decided to put the issue on the cabinet table - open for genuine debate and discussion, with a public input from his round-Britain tour - Ministers will not hesitate to side with him against the Chancellor, who has few Cabinet friends and a number of powerful enemies.

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Search police disciplined

Eleven police officers who failed to find a missing teenager because of confusion over where to look are to be disciplined.

The body of Joanne Eddison, 15, who went missing in May 1996, was discovered nine weeks later on a railway embankment 100 yards from her home in Charlton, south-east London.

Liam Tovell, 16, was later jailed for seven years after admitting manslaughter. But the prosecution claimed in court that he may "have got away with murder" because the delay in finding her body meant it was impossible to determine how she died.

The British Transport Police officers were asked to search the area where the body was found. Five officers from the Metropolitan Police and five from the BTP have received formal warnings or "advice". One BTP officer faces a disciplinary charge.

— Jason Bennetto,
Crime Correspondent



Mechanical mules: Members of the Parachute Regiment trying out quad bikes in the mud on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, yesterday to test their manoeuvrability and performance in carrying heavy weapons and ammunition on the battlefield
Photograph: Tom Pilston

Parties agree agenda for Ulster talks

The Northern Ireland political talks surmounted another significant hurdle yesterday. As David McKittrick, Ireland Correspondent, reports all parties involved – including Sinn Féin – agreed to use Monday's London-Dublin document as a basis for negotiation.

negotiations. Some voiced reservations about elements of the document, but many expressed eagerness to get down to business.

All this amounts to a something of a breakthrough, given that the document has found favour with the two largest Unionist and nationalist parties, the Ulster Unionists and SDLP. While they approve of the suggested elements of a settlement, however, they differ greatly on their relative importance, with nationalists playing up the north-south institution and Unionists emphasising the relationship with Scotland and Wales.

The document, which provided a suggested outline of a scheme with institutions to link not only Belfast, Dublin and London but Glasgow and Cardiff as well, has fulfilled most of the two governments' immediate hopes for it.

But Sinn Féin made it clear that accepting it as a basis for negotiation did not imply approval of its contents. The document envisages Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK though with a substantial new north-south link.

Sinn Féin's policy, it was made clear, remains an end to partition, an option which is not on anyone else's agenda. They will certainly be advancing their arguments in detail, but no one knows whether and when they might lower their sights to the type of arrangements outlined in Monday's document.

Most observers believe this is a key moment for the republican movement. One talks participant said: "This is an important, tricky time for them. There's now a piece of paper floating around out there which continues partition."

Negotiations are now scheduled to begin in earnest next Monday. At a brief plenary session yesterday all eight parties indicated their acceptance of the document as a basis for

negotiations. He said: "It is the case that there is an attempt, that this route-map is in effect an attempt to impose another partitionist settlement, then it will not work and Sinn Féin will not be part of it."

He added, however: "We are much more realistic than to expect that we were going to get a united Ireland immediately. We're on the record as saying that. We have a much more pragmatic, reasonable and legitimate proposition."

Paedophile who killed 'was not properly monitored'

A catalogue of errors was made by social workers in the supervision of a convicted sex offender who went on to kill a boy, a report concluded yesterday.

Thirty-four-year-old Steven Leisk, a paedophile, brutally strangled Scott Simpson, 9, from Aberdeen, with a scarf last July – two months before a supervision order on him was due to end. The order had been imposed following his earlier release from an 18-month sentence for sexual offences involving a teenage boy.

It was Leisk's fourth conviction for sexual offences against children, yet an independent report published yesterday into the handling of the case revealed that Aberdeen city council social workers had failed to monitor him properly. It says there was a "clear failure" on the part of a social worker, who has not been named, to comply with the requirements of National Standards. However, it adds, it is not possible to conclude that the failure resulted in, or contributed to, "the terrible conclusion to this case".

Luxor victim's body found

The missing body of Luxor massacre victim Karina Turner is in Germany, it emerged yesterday. West Yorkshire coroner Roger Whittaker said that a match for the 24-year-old woman's dental records and DNA samples had been made.

The body of the air stewardess, of Ripponden, West Yorkshire, has been missing since the massacre by Islamic militants on 18 November at the Temple of Queen Hatsheput, in Luxor, Egypt. A body mistakenly identified as Ms Turner's and now in the mortuary in Halifax is believed to be that of a German in whose grave Karina's remains lie. Her daughter, Shaunnah, five, and her mother Joan, 53, also died in the attack. The latter's body also went missing and was later found in Switzerland. The Turner family said last night that they were now planning a joint funeral service for all three.

Clark 'diaries' misleading

The presentation of a parody of Alan Clark's *Diaries* in the London *Evening Standard* newspaper gave the impression that it was written by the Conservative MP, the High Court was told yesterday. Geoffrey Hobbs QC, his counsel, said in a closing submission that the title, *Alan Clark's Secret Diary*, together with a photograph of him accompanying the column, amounted to false attribution of authorship. He said the "standfirst", in which the *Standard* said the diary was written by one of its journalists, Peter Bradshaw, did not clarify the situation.

Judgment will be given next week in the case, in which Mr Clark is seeking an injunction and damages. — Kathy Marks

RUC chief's Orange alert

The Chief Constable of the RUC does not want his men to join loyal orders in Northern Ireland. Ronnie Flanagan tells Channel 4's "Dispatches" programme tomorrow that he would prefer members not to be in the Orange Order or Apprentice Boys. "They (RUC officers) should think very carefully... whether membership of such organisations are actually compatible with people who view people's perception as to how they might perform their duty," he says. His comments came despite the RUC having its own Orange Lodge.

A Commons Select Committee and the Association of Chief Police Officers are currently looking into the issue.

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No-go area: The Government wants more people to cycle, but is also cracking down on what some call 'Lycra louts'

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

£20 fines for 'Lycra louts' who pedal on pavement

Cyclists face £20 fines for riding on pavements as a result of a government strategy to double the number of cycle journeys by 2010.

Ministers have been quick to trumpet the need to get people to substitute short car journeys with cycling jaunts as a way of reducing congestion and pollution.

Already planned are more cycle paths as well as a nation-wide cycle network. But with the carrot comes a stick - that of fixed-penalty notices.

Endangering pedestrians by taking to the footpath on two wheels has been illegal since 1835.

Offenders face two months in jail or a £2,500 fine but cases are rarely brought to court by hard-pressed prosecutors.

News of the new deterrent came to light after a parliamentary answer from Alun Michael, a Home Office minister, which confirmed that fines for offending cyclists would be part of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1998.

The move did not please the Cyclists Touring Club, which campaigns for cycling

rights. It attacked the development as "unfair and unnecessary".

A spokesman said: "Bicycles on pavements is a symptom of generally poor facilities for cyclists. Fines will only force riders back on to dangerous roads or put them off using a bicycle, full stop."

The move was described by the *Daily Mail* as a crackdown against "Lycra louts", cyclists who plough through red lights or use the pavement to avoid busy roads.

In fact, it is a recognition by the Government of the problems they will face handling more cyclists.

In 1995 more than 350 pedestrians - the most recorded - were hurt or killed by cyclists.

Last year two people were killed and nearly 90 injured.

Other measures being considered include forcing cyclists to carry bells so that pedestrians can be warned of danger and, more controversially, coaxing hikers to wear helmets.

— Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

Web quacks add to GPs' work load

Hypochondriac Internet surfers are looking up ailments and then convincing themselves they have life-threatening symptoms. Rosa Prince says doctors are wasting valuable time reassuring patients frightened by misinformation.

Rogue Internet sites are accumulating on the Web from all over the world, offering magic cures, warning of dire new diseases or giving bad advice even for simple ailments.

In other cases, patients, some with serious diseases, are given the impression they have stumbled across a miracle cure on the Internet.

David Pearce, a Leeds GP, said: "The main worry is that anybody can put information on the Internet about diseases. The false hope this can bring to patients, particularly those who are suffering from chronic illnesses and are very vulnerable, is terrible."

"There are even discussion groups where doctors will make diagnoses of people who type in their symptoms via the Internet. It's a nightmare."

On a recent *British Medical Journal* search of 41 Web pages to discover the best way to treat a child with fever, only four gave the correct diagnosis. The problem is proving particularly bad for doctors treating patients with serious illnesses.

When a person is first diagnosed, family and friends often search the Internet for information about the disease, lead-

ing them to large amounts of false advice. Peter Chambers, of the charity CancerBACUP, said: "The Internet provides an example of how a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

He said some cancer patients acting on Web information took hydrazine sulphate, which is derived from rocket fuel and is ineffective against cancer, and stopped taking their anti-nausea and pain-relieving drugs when they reacted with the hydrazine. BACUP responded by creating its own Web site to provide accurate information.

Doctors tell patients interested in the Internet to use it wisely by accessing credible organisations and help-groups. Iona Heath, who has a surgery north London, said: "There is an awful lot of garbage out there ... but it can be helpful too. The Web can sometimes be very good for people with rare diagnosis when they can learn more than I can tell them."

John Chisholm, chairman of the BMA's GPs Council, said: "People have to use a bit of discretion when using the Internet but doctors have to recognise more and more people are going to be using it. Often they can become experts and get a lot of useful information."

Some GPs are worried they do not have the time to cope with the challenges of the Web. Grant Kelly, chairman of the BMA's General Practice Computing Group, said: "You get people coming into the surgery and saying 'I want to try this drug or that treatment'. It's not a problem, as we can talk it over and usually explain why it is not appropriate, but it is all taking a long time and that's one thing GPs don't have."

Smoking damage lasts a lifetime

The harmful effects of cigarettes may last a lifetime, says a study which suggests that even smokers who give up may have done irreversible damage to their arteries.

Doctors had believed that the increased risk of heart disease and lung cancer returned to zero after about 10 years, but the new research casts doubt on this. It found the effects on arteries may be cumulative and that even passive smoking may cause permanent damage.

American researchers who studied almost 11,000 middle-aged adults found that atherosclerosis - thickening of the arteries - was 50 per cent worse in smokers than in non-smokers, as expected. However, it was also 25 per cent worse in past smokers than in people who had never smoked, suggesting a persistent effect of smoking.

The arteries were thickest in those who had smoked most for longest and their thickness was less strongly linked with whether they were current or past smokers. The scientists used ultrasound to measure by

how much the walls of the carotid artery thickened over a three-year period.

The study - conducted by researchers at Wake Forest University, North Carolina, and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* - also found a "surprisingly large" correlation between passive smoking and atherosclerosis. In those exposed to other people's smoke for at least one hour a week thickening of the arteries was 20 per cent worse than in those who breathed clean air.

The British Heart Foundation said smokers should not use the findings as an excuse not to give up. A spokesman said: "There are physical changes that occur when you give up that makes stopping smoking a very important issue for preventing heart disease and atherosclerosis. Nobody has ever said arteries heal themselves up when you stop smoking. What this research says is that they carry on thickening, but the process does slow down."

— Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

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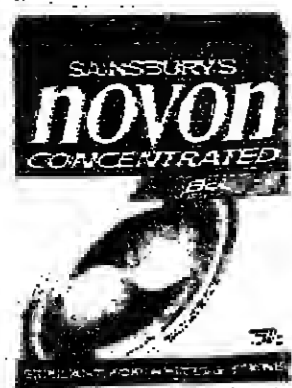


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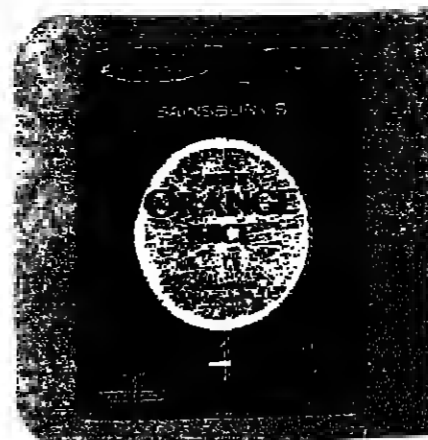
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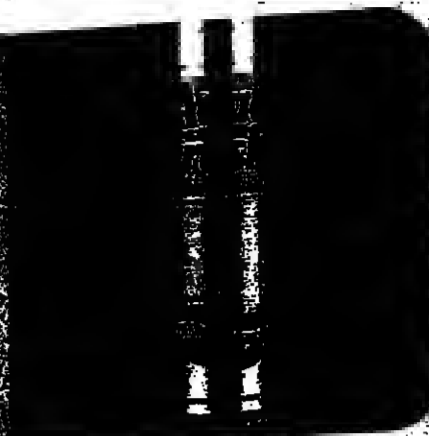
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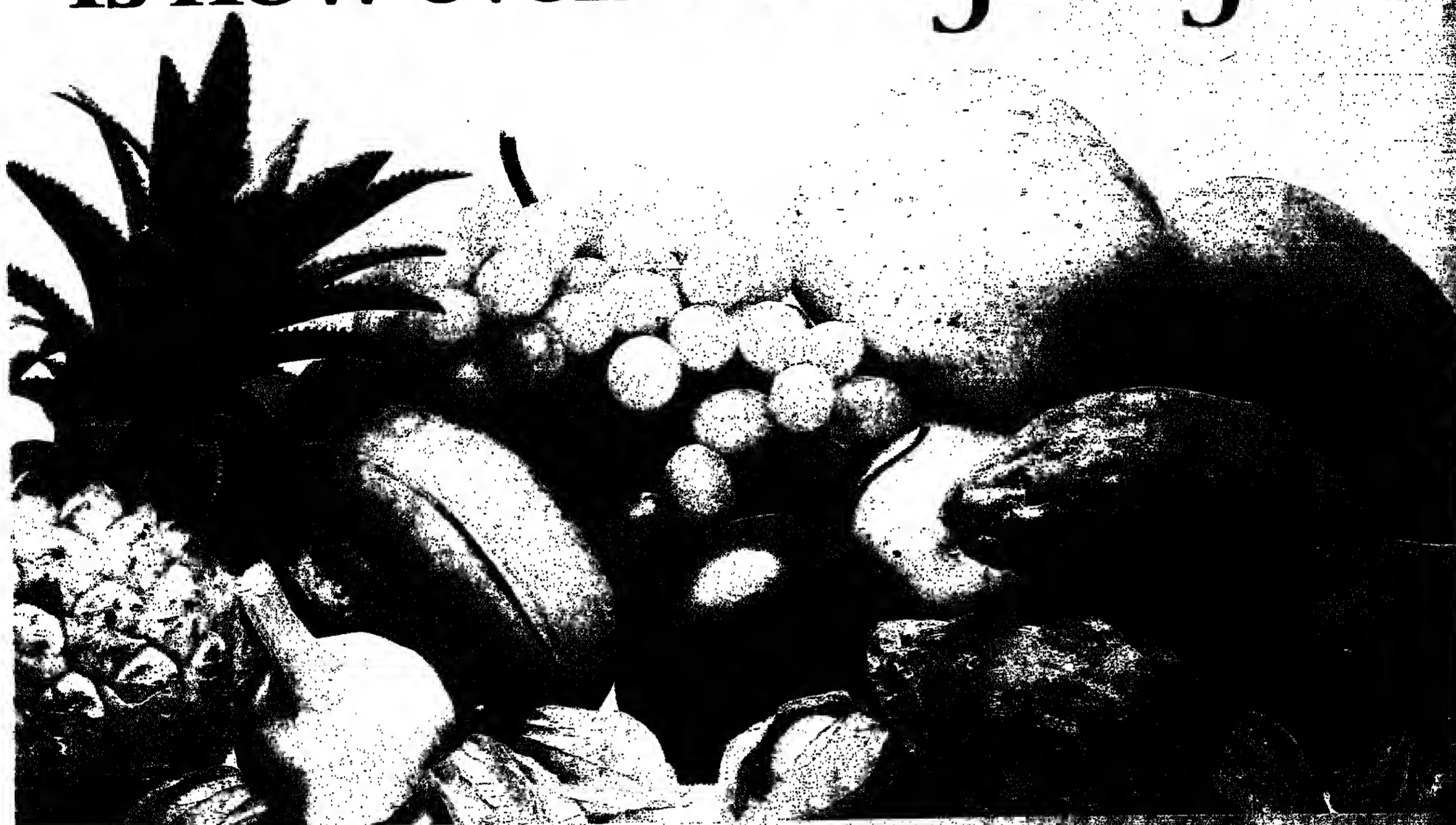
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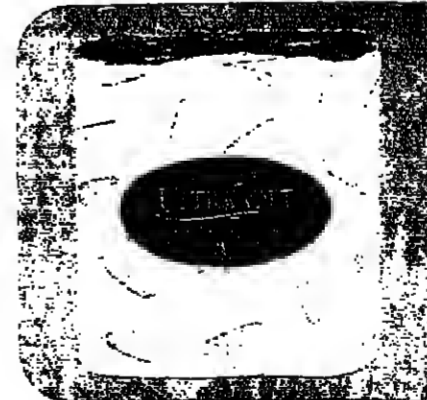
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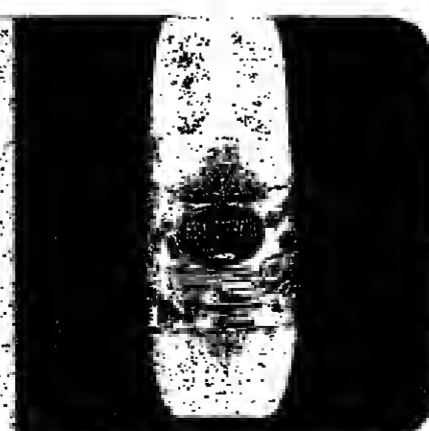


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THE INDEPENDENT
WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY 1998
15

Alien resurrection – the flares that never died



Oh my gawd – it's the Seventies. They've remembered the decade that fashion forgot, writes Tamsin Blanchard. Photographs by James Cant.

If, seen from here, the Seventies were your worst sartorial nightmare, then prepare to confront it all over again. This week, *Boogie Nights*, the epic movie about the porn industry of Seventies West Coast America, starring Mark Wahlberg as Dirk Diggler in brown Crimplene flares, opens at a cinema near you.

And that's not all. In early February, Sigourney Weaver takes to the big screen in *The Ice Storm*, a more cerebral story set on America's East Coast in the earlier half of the decade, 1973 to be precise. Before you know it, you'll be singing "Boogie Nights" and getting on down to your local Oxfam store in search of clothing horrors – halter necks, boob tubes and gold Lurex galore; or, even worse, you'll be dragging out those relics of your youth that you couldn't quite bare to part with. Horrors of the haunted wardrobe!

"They keep saying the Seventies are coming back," says Sigourney, whose movie clothes are more *Abigail's Party* than disco fever. "They are not coming back. They could not come back. They would not be allowed in." This a woman who knows the meaning of horror and fear. Clearly, *Alien Resurrection* was a picnic by comparison.

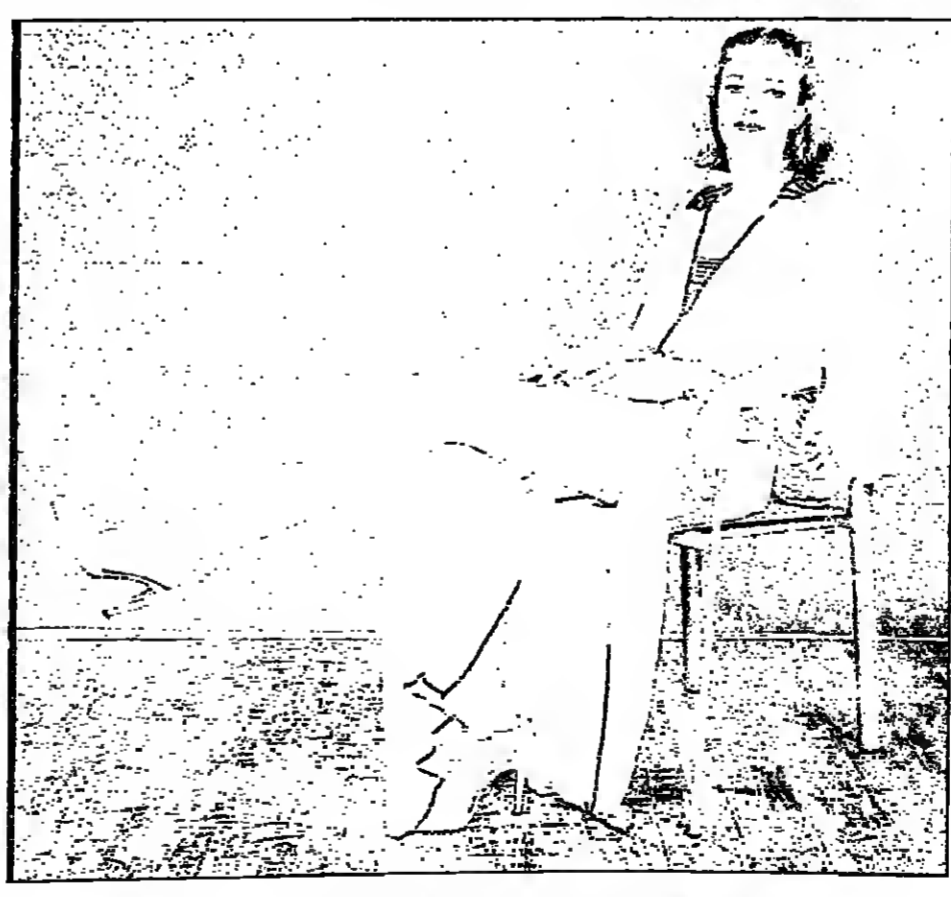
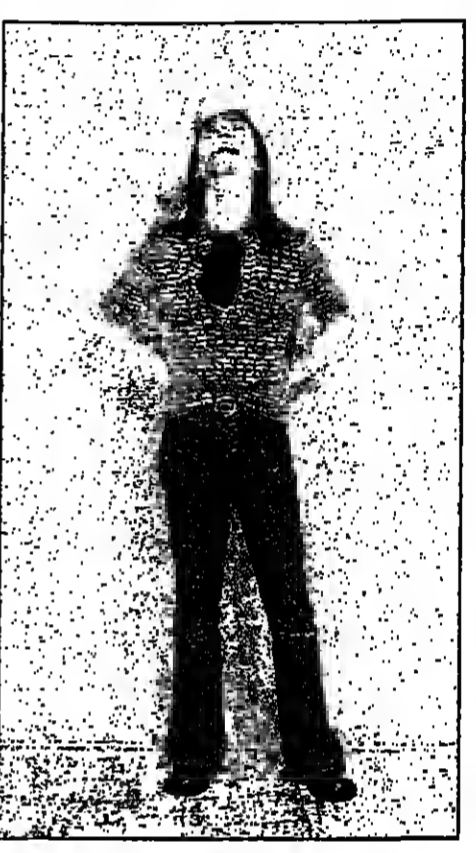
Sigourney may not be able to stomach men in big collars and hideously Seventies brown, rust, orange and gold. They don't do it for most people. But for those who didn't live through the decade that style forgot, the Seventies looks remarkably, well, stylish. Of course, many of the decade's fashions were downright ugly, but for young fashion folk, that is the attraction. Huge, rounded collars, wide, spooly-shaped shoes, chunky platforms, colossal flares, pearly green eyeshadow, and jarring colour clashes: just let us get at 'em!

Of course, films such as *Boogie Nights* are a godsend to shops specialising in retro clothing. The Pop Boutique has clothes from the Fifties to the Seventies: it is even doing good business in vintage tracksuit tops. A certain Fila tracksuit top like the one worn by Björn Borg sells for between £70 and £80, bobbles and all. Nylon shirts and polyester flares are also hot property, not to mention a tad moist and sweaty, too. Prices start at £14.50 for super fly-collared shirts and £16.50 for the sort of pants that some of us hoped might never see the light of day again. A lot of Pop Boutique's customers are after clothes for one-off Seventies nights. Others are committed to the decade full time.

London's clubland has also discovered that the Seventies are big business. The names of the "nights" say it all: Carwash, Voulez Vous, Starsky and Hutch, Groove Train and Good Times are just a few hot spots where a convincingly flyaway outfit is a free ticket to trip the light fantastic.

At the Electric Ballroom in London's Camden Town on Saturday nights, Saturday Night Fever offers free entry to anyone who makes an effort to dress up like John Travolta, or somebody from *Abigail's Party*. The Independent's stylist, Sophia Neophitou, took a suitcase of choice pieces from the decade to add a touch of fashion class to the retro clubbers. They all loved the dressing-up box, whose contents ranged from flared jeans to a silk, draped evening dress by Bill Gibb, a collector's item and a snip at £175 from Steinberg and Tolkein on London's King's Road. Mark Steinberg has a keen interest in both film and fashion. *Boogie Nights* will undoubtedly increase demand for vintage Seventies clothing, although Steinberg attributes the revival to last year's movie, *LA Confidential*, the jewellery for which all came from the London shop.

"The Seventies has never really been out of fashion," he says. And judging by the designers – including John Galiano and New Yorker Anna Sui – who have been scouting around shops such as the Pop Boutique for inspiration, the look is here to stay.



Photographer's assistant: Philippa
Styling: Sophia Neophitou
Styling assistant: Warren Moronha
Shot on location at Saturday Night Fever, every Saturday at the Electric Ballroom, 184 Camden High Street, London

NW1, £7, £5 to members; free if you dress in Seventies outfits, 10.30pm-3am (0171-485 9006)

Clockwise from main picture: Laura wears jacket and culottes suit, £34, shiny polo-

neck top, £12, beige boots, £39, all from Blackout II, 51 Endell Street, London WC2 (0171-240 5006)

Dawn wears zip-front dress, £375, by Pucci, from Steinberg and Tolkein, 193 King's Road, SW3 (0171-376 3660)

Asaki wears top, £35, from Cenci, 31 Monmouth Street, London WC2 (0171-836 4400); flared jeans, £35, from Pop Boutique, 6 Monmouth Street, London WC2; Dr Martens shoes, model's own

Laura wears gold Spandex

trousers, 20p, from The Cat Shelter open-day jumble sale. Sheffield: scarf top, £220, by Pucci, from Steinberg and Tolkein, as before

Donna wears pink silk evening dress, £175, by Bill Gibb, from Steinberg and Tolkein, as

before; cream shoes, £24, from Blackout II, as before

Donna wears pink sequin boob tube, £10, pink sequin necklace, £5, pink sequined bag, £10, all from Cornucopia, 12 Upper Tachbrook Street, London SW1 (0171-828 5752)

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⌘

Sale

from
Friday 9th January
until
Saturday 17th January

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